DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 404 013 PS 024 996

AUTHOR Podmore, Valerie N.; Sawicka, Theresa
TITLE Balancing Early Childhood Education and Work. Consultations with Key Groups about Striking a Balance: Families, Work, and Early Childhood Education.
INSTITUTION New Zealand Council for Educational Research, Wellington.
REPORT NO ISBN-0-908916-98-1
PUB DATE 96
NOTE 39p.; For a related document, see ED 394 728.
AVAILABLE FROM New Zealand Council for Educational Research, P.O. Box 3237, Wellington, New Zealand.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Access to Education; Day Care; Day Care Centers; *Early Childhood Education; *Employed Parents; Employer Supported Day Care; Employment; Employment Patterns; Family (Sociological Unit); *Family Work Relationship; Financial Support; Foreign Countries; Interviews; Language Maintenance; Maori (People); Pacific Islanders; Program Attitudes; Public Policy; Young Children
IDENTIFIERS *Access to Services; Family Leave; New Zealand; Parental Leave

ABSTRACT

This report documents some of the findings from a consultative interview process which marked the final stage of a New Zealand research program on families, work, and education. The consultations followed from, and were based in part on, the report "Striking a Balance: Families, Work, and Early Childhood Education." The focus of this short, follow-up report is on topics concerned with early childhood education and parents in paid work. The report incorporates information provided by 16 key early childhood, community, and policy groups. Issues addressed in the consultations included: (1) benefits and problems of work-based early childhood education; (2) benefits and difficulties of maximizing parents' work time by increasing the hours available for early childhood education services; (3) benefits and difficulties of multiple use of early childhood education services; (4) pros and cons for parents of having a range of early childhood education services available; (5) language maintenance (especially for Maori children); (6) access to early childhood education services in terms of fees and funding, transportation, and location; (7) extent to which services accommodate New Zealand families' changing patterns of paid work; and (8) links between early childhood education policies, parental leave, and other labor market and health policies. The report includes a summary of findings and an appendix containing the interview questions. Contains 15 references. (Author/EV)

ED 404 013

PS

Balancing Early Childhood Education and Work

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

Consultations with Key Groups about

Striking a Balance:
Families, Work, and Early Childhood Education

Valerie N. Podmore
with
Theresa Sawicka

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
B A. Webbe
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

CE 049 906

New Zealand Council for Educational Research
Wellington

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Balancing Early Childhood Education and Work

Consultations with Key Groups about

Striking a Balance:
Families, Work, and Early Childhood Education

Valerie N. Podmore
with
Theresa Sawicka

New Zealand Council for Educational Research
Wellington
1996

The research was supported by grants from the Foundation for Research, Science and Technology.

© NZCER, 1996
ISBN 0-908916-98-1

Published by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research
P O Box 3237
Wellington

Distributed by NZCER Distribution Services
P O Box 3237
Wellington
New Zealand

ABSTRACT

This report documents some findings from a consultative interview process which marked the final stage of a research programme on families, work, and education. The consultations followed on from, and were based in part on, the report *Striking a balance: Families, work, and early childhood education*. The focus of this short, follow-up report is on topics concerned with early childhood education and parents in paid work. The report incorporates information provided by 16 of the key early childhood, community, and policy groups.

Issues addressed in the consultations include:

- benefits and problems associated with work-based or industry-based early childhood education;
- benefits and difficulties of maximising parents' work time by increasing the hours that early childhood education services are available;
- benefits and difficulties of multiple use of the early childhood education services for young children;
- benefits or difficulties, for parents and young children, of having a range of different early childhood education services available;
- language maintenance, parents in paid work, and early childhood education;
- access to the early childhood education services, in terms of fees and funding, and transport, travel, and siting of centres;
- the extent to which the early childhood services accommodate New Zealand families' changing patterns of paid work;
- the links between early childhood education policies, parental leave and other labour market policies, and health policies.

Other main themes evident in the interview transcripts and written submissions from the key groups are: children's needs and valuing children, parental choice, quality early childhood education services, and inequality, resourcing, and the specific needs of the Pacific Island early childhood centres.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This independent research was funded on contract to the Foundation for Research, Science and Technology. We acknowledge gratefully the support of the Foundation.

This short report is based on part of the final consultations of a joint study by NZCER and Paul Callister & Associates. Paul Callister and Valerie Podmore were joint project leaders. Paul Callister took the main responsibility for preparing a separate paper on parental leave, and Valerie Podmore took the main responsibility for this report.

We appreciated the involvement of the representatives of the groups who participated in the consultation interviews and of those who responded in writing. We acknowledge that they made invaluable contributions, and they supplied much of the information in this report. They also spent time checking and collaborating on transcripts and meeting notes, and the excerpts quoted in the draft report.

A team of researchers took part in the consultations. We are grateful to Peter Keegan and Renee Sisley from Te Wāhanga Kaupapa Māori for their welcome advice and active part in consulting with representatives of Maori groups. We are also grateful for Paul Callister's active part in the consultations and acknowledge Judith Galtry's informed involvement in one of the interviews. Anne Meade offered helpful support and reviewing throughout the project, and commented on the draft manuscript.

At NZCER, Peter Ridder contributed to the final production, Fay Swann edited the manuscript, and Angela Tennant, Carlene Grigg, and Nicky McKibbin provided secretarial assistance. Lia Burgess also provided helpful input during a final consultative seminar.

Valerie Podmore and Theresa Sawicka
1996

CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
INTRODUCTION	1
Background to the Report	1
Procedures	2
MAIN FINDINGS	4
Work-based Early Childhood Education	4
Difficulties	4
Health and Safety	4
Separation from Community	5
Language Maintenance	5
Small Businesses	5
Restructuring and Stability	5
Voluntary Work and Parent Participation	5
Fees and Access	6
Benefits	6
Travel, Transport, and Parking	6
Breastfeeding Support	6
Funding and Costs	7
Gender Balance in the Workplace	7
Educational Institutions	7
Recommendations	7
Operating Hours of the Early Childhood Services	8
Catering for Parents in Shift Work	8
Difficulties of Increasing Hours	9
Impact on Children and Families	9
Funding Policies	9
Insufficient Information	10
Pacific Island Communities	10
Recommendations	10
Multiple Use of the Early Childhood Services	11
Benefits	11
Choice and Diversity	11
Age-appropriate Choices	11

Page

Difficulties 12
Stress on Family Members 12
Instability for Children 12
Funding Arrangements 12
Collection of Accurate Statistical Data 12

Recommendations 13

Range of Early Childhood Services 13
Benefits 13
Difficulties 14
Recommendations 14

Language Maintenance, Parents in Paid Work, and Early Childhood Education 14
Support for Language Maintenance 14
Language Maintenance as an Additional Service 15
Maori Parents and Choice 15
Funding and Licensing of Pacific Island Early Childhood Centres 15
Employment Prospects 15

Access to the Early Childhood Education Services 16
Funding and Fees 16
Funding and Universal Provision 16
Targeting and Childcare Subsidies 16
Funding Levels 16
Fees 17
Access Issues for Maori Families 18
Access Issues for Pacific Island Families 18
Transport, Travel, and Siting of Centres 18
Transport to Early Childhood Centres 18
Siting of Early Childhood Centres 19

Changing Patterns of Parents' Paid Work and the Early Childhood Education Services 19
Changes within the Early Childhood Education Services 19
Values and Assumptions 20
Recommendations 20

Links Between Early Childhood Education, Parental Leave, the Labour Market, and Health Policies 21

Themes and Issues 21
Valuing Children 21
Parental Choice 22

Page

Quality of Services 23
Pacific Island Early Childhood Education 23

SUMMARY 25

References 27
Appendix A 28

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Report

This short report focuses on early childhood education and parents in paid work. The data presented here are derived from a series of consultations with national-level representatives of key early childhood, community, and policy groups. The participant groups, who discussed a set of questions about early childhood education and parents in paid work, provided information based on the research report *Striking a balance: Families, work, and early childhood education* (Callister, Podmore, Galtry, & Sawicka, 1995) and their experience in the field.

In that report, there were some key research findings on early childhood education and parents in paid work of relevance to children, parents, and families; employers; and policy makers (*see* Callister *et al.*, pp. 193–194). Some of the overall key findings on early childhood education and parents in paid work included:

- The importance of having policies which promote the provision of high-quality early childhood education and care services is supported by international research, and also by the case studies of families (*see* Podmore & Sawicka, 1995).
- Parents in paid work are striving to balance their young children's needs and their own needs, which can lead to their using several early childhood education and care services concurrently.
- Parents are concerned that early childhood education and care arrangements meet the emotional needs of their children during the first years of life, and that 4-year-old children receive adequate cognitive and language stimulation. Language maintenance appears a priority for some parents with children at a kohanga reo or Pacific Island early childhood centre.
- There has been a trend in the United States towards employer-provided childcare facilities, as a part of "family friendly" practices in workplaces. There is also some evidence of this trend within Australia and New Zealand. At the same time, other researchers and developmental psychologists have emphasised the importance of policies which promote the universal provision of high-quality education and care services.
- Theoretical models showing links between working life and family life focus on individuals. There appears scope for a redefinition of some models to include other family members. (Callister *et al.*, 1995, p. iv)

Issues explored during the follow-up consultations include:

- benefits and problems associated with work-based or industry-based early childhood education;
- benefits and difficulties of maximising parents' work time by increasing the hours that early childhood education services are available;
- benefits and difficulties of multiple use of the early childhood education services for young children;
- benefits or difficulties, for parents and young children, of having a range of different early childhood education services available;

- language maintenance, parents in paid work, and early childhood education;
- access to the early childhood education services, in terms of: fees and funding, and transport, travel, and siting of centres;
- the extent to which the early childhood services accommodate New Zealand families' changing patterns of paid work;
- the links between early childhood education policies, parental leave and other labour market policies, and health policies.

This report includes the information provided by 16 groups. Two of the 16 groups asked to be unidentifiable in any written reports, and a seventeenth group requested that their organisation's views should not be included in reports. The researchers invariably accommodated these requests. Some members of the 13 groups who participated in the interviews and consultation meetings also supplied written statements or policy documents. Three of the 16 groups who participated responded to the questions in writing. Three other groups invited to take part in an interview did not volunteer to participate.

The people who participated were consulted for their institutional opinion. However, most of the representatives of organisations did not leave their other roles at the door of the interview or meeting room. Early childhood representatives, for example, sometimes spoke as parents, grandparents, or employers, as well as representatives of their organisation. Where the representative specified that a particular statement represented their organisation's practices or policies, and if they agreed that these could be quoted, this report acknowledges the organisational source.

Procedures

The interviews took place at a time and place convenient to our informants and selected by them. Venues included the offices or meeting rooms of the key groups consulted and of the New Zealand Council for Educational Research. The consultations took place in the greater Wellington region and in Auckland.

Where appropriate and if the informants agreed, the interviews or meetings were tape recorded, and the tapes were transcribed. We suggested to all our informants who participated in taped interviews that if at any point during the interview they would like the tape recorder turned off, we were happy to do this, and this happened quite frequently. The tapes were confidential to the research team, and it was agreed that they were to be wiped after transcription processes were completed. Participants were all offered a copy of the transcript of their interview, with the opportunity to correct, update, or delete portions of the transcript. Similarly, wherever the meetings were not tape recorded, the participants were sent a copy of the meeting notes for approval, correction, and/or updating.

We explained to all groups that:

> Recommendations about early childhood education and parents in paid work, and about parental leave, are sought from key groups. This consultation process is the final stage of a research programme on Families, Work, and Education . . .

A copy of the interview questions on early childhood education and parents in paid work is included as appendix A. The questions and topic areas for consultation were derived from the overall findings of the international research, case studies of families in Aotearoa/New Zealand, and census data reported in Callister *et al.*(1995). We pointed out to all groups we consulted that:

> Your organisation's views are important to the study. But if there are any questions you would rather not answer, or you feel are outside your organisation's area, that's quite all right, we'll leave them out. . . . The main purpose of the interview is to collect information, views, and recommendations from your organisation.

Clearly some questions were more relevant to some groups than others. Given that a few of the topic areas were derived mainly from the international research, the cultural relevance of a few questions also varied.

MAIN FINDINGS

Work-based Early Childhood Education

Representatives of several early childhood organisations we consulted said that their organisation had little or no direct involvement in work-based early childhood education. More pressing concerns for Pacific Island families, and for many Maori families, include language maintenance and low incomes or unemployment.

A representative from the Pacific Islands Early Childhood Council of Aotearoa pointed out that many Pacific Island people "live under the poverty line", and explained that fees at the childcare centres and creches are too high for Pasifika families. Financial problems mean that many families choose care with the grandparents. Work-based childcare centres are also likely to be English-speaking centres. Community-based arrangements are preferred, to meet the needs of families.

Representatives of many of the key groups described both difficulties and benefits associated with work-based or industry-based early childhood education. Difficulties included the adequacy of outdoor space provided; health and safety in terms of the siting of workplaces; workplace restructuring and stability for children and families; high fees and related access issues; problems for small-scale workplaces and for employers with "a number of scattered work sites"; restricted choice with regard to language maintenance; separation of children from their home communities; and reduced opportunities for voluntary involvement and active parent participation in centre management.

Representatives also described benefits, such as convenience for breastfeeding mothers and increased contact time between working parents and their young children. Other benefits included greater gender balance in workplaces which provide early childhood education facilities and thereby enable women to move back into the work force; provision of capital costs; enhanced loyalty and productivity among staff with childcare requirements; and convenience for parents in terms of transport or parking.

Difficulties

Health and Safety

Health and safety appeared potentially problematic, both at early childhood centres on industrial sites where hazardous substances may be present, and in high-rise city buildings. One informant viewed the difficulties of high rise buildings this way:

> If we're talking about the work being an office block in the middle of town there's the whole issue of outdoor space, and health and safety . . . early childhood centres in high rise buildings are generally not the best environment for young children, and that in a country like New Zealand . . . we can have centres close to the city without actually having to put them in high rise buildings where the outdoor space is very limited and there are a whole lot of other issues as well.

Representatives from the NZEI Te Riu Roa said "there's the issue of high-rise buildings, which we don't believe are appropriate".

Separation from Community

Several groups pointed out that attending work-based centres tends to separate young children from their home communities and the peers with whom they will later attend school. Our informants described how young children benefit from participating at early childhood centres located in their home area.

Language Maintenance

A further difficulty described related to maintenance of Maori and Pacific Island languages. Several informants commented on how work-based centres restrict language choice.

Small Businesses

The Employers' Federation wrote that there were a number of problems associated with work-based or industry-based care. Their first point was that:

> Most New Zealanders are employed in undertakings which are too small in scale to make the provision of such care feasible (except, as will happen from time-to-time, on an informal and *ad hoc* basis).

Restructuring and Stability

Several groups highlighted the impact on children of: workplace restructuring, parents' changing their places of work, or management priorities changing within workplaces with consequent closing down of childcare facilities. Some of our informants advocated placing more emphasis on the children.

One of the representatives from Te Tari Puna Ora O Aotearoa/New Zealand Childcare Association, provided specific examples of instability of arrangements:

> I've seen children have to move. I saw one pair of children moved 3 times within the space of about 18 months because the working parent moved where she was working and the children just got shunted around.

A representative from Plunket pointed out similarly that if a mother left her job the child would probably lose her/his place at the early childhood centre, and this "would not be good for the child in terms of continuity of care and education".

Representatives from the NZEI Te Riu Roa drew attention to the problems for children aged over 4 years:

> Another issue coming up which we've experienced in fact is when parents leave the workplace and go to work somewhere else, does the child go too, or can the child stay? It can be incredibly disruptive for a 4½-year-old having to move from one centre and to find somewhere else to go.

Voluntary Work and Parent Participation

Several groups said that voluntary, unpaid work is less feasible at on-site or workplace early childhood centres. A related difficulty was establishing parents' active participation in centre management. A representative from the New Zealand Playcentre Federation commented that there are currently no work-based playcentres. She explained that a difficulty experienced in the past when a playcentre was sited at a workplace was "matching the two philosophies up, because playcentres are parent co-operatives".

Fees and Access

Informants from two of the organisations discussed difficulties related to costs and fees. Representatives of the NZEI Te Riu Roa said that one benefit of work-based centres is improved access in terms of travel and transport to early childhood education. However they added that, if the fees are high, not all families involved at the work site offering the childcare facility benefit:

> The ones who get the access tend to be the higher-income salary earners and that still leaves those with lower incomes without access to childcare even though the employer is providing that facility. So there are some anomalies there that need to be worked out. And also it may not be the only answer. When talking to the employees, they might need more flexible hours or different employment practices or whatever, rather than having the childcare facilities on site. So it may actually be too easy to say that this is the answer. So I think that in itself can be a difficulty, because you're actually targeting a specific issue for a wider problem.

Benefits

Travel, Transport, and Parking

Several other groups specified that one of the benefits of work-based early childhood education and care is ease of access in terms of transport to the centre. The National Council of Women wrote that benefits include: "Allowing people to work if they so choose. More contact between parent and child with more time together, less of which is travelling time".

Breastfeeding Support

Representatives from many groups, including the La Leche League, emphasised that support of breastfeeding is a benefit of work-based early childhood education and care. Written communication received from the Royal New Zealand Plunket Society stated:

> The ability for mothers to breastfeed is enhanced as children would be close by so mothers could breastfeed in their breaks. Increasing and maintaining breastfeeding is a key health goal for New Zealand.

Representatives of Barnardo's New Zealand described both benefits and difficulties, and one benefit of work-based centres was the support of breast feeding mothers :

> There are very definite benefits for the children and the parents who are using work-based childcare. Especially with young babies—having the child with proximity to the parent enables breastfeeding. It also enables parents who are anxious about the children and want to visit them during the day to do that and for a lot of people that's quite important. There are also benefits due to the difficulty of transporting children to and from childcare. There are some difficulties with them as well, but they are not difficulties that can't be overcome. They need to be recognised by the workplace and dealt with, for example, how is the centre funded, how is the centre managed? They need quite clear guidelines as to who takes responsibility for what. Workplace centres are a recognition of the needs of parents by the employer and this is positive.

Funding and Costs

Although some groups described high fees as a definite drawback for parents, one group also commented on the benefits of having capital costs covered. A representative of Te Tari Puna Ora O Aotearoa/New Zealand Childcare Association, who discussed both benefits and difficulties, made this statement on the benefits of work-based centres:

> The capital costs are usually provided so you actually get a new centre set up somewhere, that it's usually more or less close to parents, and that's an advantage both in terms of parents visiting during the day but particularly for breastfeeding.

However, representatives of several groups stressed that publicly funded early childhood education and care was their preferred priority. A representative of the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions stated:

> I don't think there are any benefits if you compare it [industry-based centres] to a properly funded public early childhood education system. The closest benefit would be if you were breastfeeding or for young babies wanting closer contact with them. But I think the offset against that is the disadvantage of being dependent for your childcare on your employment.

Gender Balance in the Workplace

Another benefit described by some informants was the movement of women into workplaces which provide on-site childcare arrangements. They thought there was more of a gender balance in workplaces which provided an on-site early childhood education and care facility.

Educational Institutions

Some groups differentiated between industry-based centres, and centres sited at educational organisations. For example, one Maori group described several problems for employers and others with work-based industry-based centres, but also commented on the importance of centres based at educational institutions, because Maori may be returning to education later in life after they have had children.

Representatives from Te Puni Kōkiri supported "policies which encourage increased Māori participation in high-quality early childhood education and access by Māori parents to services of their choice".

Recommendations

This issue generated diverse recommendations. Our informants from several early childhood organisations said that work-based early childhood education was of little relevance to the groups they represented. Perhaps the relative importance of this issue needs to be reinterpreted within the early childhood and cultural context of Aotearoa/New Zealand.

However, representatives from two of the organisations recommended that work-based childcare centres should definitely be available to promote breastfeeding. A strong recommendation to this effect came from the representatives from the La Leche League and from Plunket.

There was a call for further New Zealand research and consultation from the Employers' Federation, with the recommendation:

> That greater consultation with parents be undertaken to establish what childcare options are preferred. Information to date tends to be less than concrete in character, with overseas studies useful only as a guide rather than a basis for developing New Zealand child care policies.

Other groups recommended that employers who do provide early childhood centres need backup support from people with early childhood education expertise:

> A lot of employers would feel that they don't have the expertise and they are concerned about working in that area. That's where organisations like Barnardo's New Zealand and others can help and can either run the centres on behalf of the employer, or give advice on how to do it. There is a real need for partnerships with experts in the field.

Management issues were also addressed by representatives from Te Tari Puna Ora O Aotearoa/New Zealand Childcare Association, who recommended that the parents "have some real clout in the management", and that centres "be set up along the right principles not be seen as problem-solving for the industry but for the children, as proper quality education".

Several early childhood and parent groups recommended that the quality of the early childhood education and care provided for children is the key concern, regardless of where an early childhood centre is sited. A representative from Parents' Centres New Zealand read out their 1986 position statement on childcare:

> The Federation of New Zealand Parents' Centres supports the provision of childcare services for 0- to 5-year-olds and 5- to 14-year-olds provided the care is of high quality with trained staff and low child/staff ratios. The Federation of New Zealand Parents' Centres recognises the potential of childcare services to contribute to the support of families, enabling participation in society by all parents in whatever manner they choose and in doing so providing an enriched, nurturing environment for children.

Operating Hours of the Early Childhood Education Services

Representatives of the groups consulted addressed two aspects of parents' working hours:

- the needs of parents working shift work;
- whether family members are working longer hours in total.

Focusing on either or both of these two areas, they discussed the benefits and difficulties of maximising parents' work time by increasing the hours that the early childhood services are available. There was also support for providing access to immersion services for 30 hours per week to enhance children's Maori language learning.

Catering for Parents in Shift Work

Representatives of many groups commented on the importance of catering for shift work. Several informants supported the provision of early childhood education services which are responsive to the needs of communities where families are involved in shift work. There was some support for early

childhood services being available longer hours, but also concern about the total number of hours per day a child attends a centre.

Difficulties of Increasing Hours

Impact on Children and Families

Several groups communicated their concern about the impact of parents' long hours of work on children and families. This issue was also raised by several families in the case studies in the report (Podmore & Sawicka, 1995).

A representative from Plunket pointed out the benefits of parents being able to work shift work or flexible hours while their children have access to "high-quality, affordable early childhood services", but also commented on difficulties when parents work long hours:

> As a society we need to protect families and young children. Families should be able to afford to spend time together. Although it's important for society to make available the highest quality, affordable, flexible child care, it's also important that parents aren't forced to work longer and longer hours to make ends meet. The economy should work to support families rather than families working to support the economy.

One group suggested that children should not be left at a creche any earlier than 7.30 a.m. Representatives from a range of groups expressed the belief that currently much emphasis is placed on parents in paid work, but insufficient priority is given to the educational needs of young children. A representative from the NZEI Te Riu Roa put forward this view: "The needs of children are paramount, so whatever you do it has to be to develop the situation that's best for the child, and the parents, and the caregivers, and the community".

Funding Policies

An affordability problem was evident for low-income families who work full-time hours and use full-day childcare. Representatives pointed out that the childcare subsidy provides a maximum of $65 per week per child, which is somewhat less than full-day childcare fees. Informants described childcare fees as ranging upward from $100, and one group provided an example of a (work-based) childcare centre charging $220 a week.

Another difficulty concerned the cost of providing high-quality care after hours and in the weekend. The National Council of Women commented that "longer hours mean extra staff working on shift-hour rosters which can raise the costs of running a centre".

Several groups pointed out that one proposed change to the government funding policies could improve the flexibility of the timing of sessions. Informants explained how government funding requirements had stipulated that sessions should be held either prior to or after a mid-point of the day. This had limited the flexibility of timing of sessions because they could not "straddle that mid-point". However, the removal of that mid-point was expected to enable sessional services to be more responsive to community needs. A representative from the New Zealand Free Kindergarten Associations commented on the likely effects of that change towards meeting the needs of some rural communities and parents in part-time work.

Insufficient Information

The New Zealand Employers Federation focused, with reference to employment contracts, on the total number of hours parents worked. The comments made concerned a lack of information:

> This is a difficult question to answer since currently employed parents will already be working contractually-agreed hours. Whether these same parents wish to work longer hours, and/or whether the employer would wish them to do so, is impossible to know. Here again, lack of information means that any answers provided can be at best speculative.

Pacific Island Communities

A representative of the Pacific Islands Early Childhood Council of Aotearoa (PIECCA) pointed out several problems, including a mismatch between parents' hours of paid work and the number of hours the predominantly unlicensed Pacific Island early childhood centres are permitted to operate. Most families use home care for their children; "45 percent are at kindergartens because they are 'free' without required fees"; and "13 percent go to Pasifika"—the Pacific Island early childhood centres.

PIECCA's preference is for families to participate at an early childhood centre with education "delivered in the mother tongue, reflecting cultural values". The aims are to raise education of children and teachers, and to increase the number of licensed centres. Parents want the best education for their children and send them to kindergarten, but at kindergarten there is a problem with language—the mother tongue is not spoken.

At the time of our interview with PIECCA, only about 24 of the 240 Pacific Island early childhood centres were licensed, and there are problems in the hours the centres are permitted to operate. The unlicensed centres operate for 3 hours, 3 mornings a week, and they do not meet mothers' or fathers' needs. There are around 200 centres that need to be licensed so that parents can leave their children there while they work. Auckland has 140 centres and only 6 are licensed. There needs to be more linking between the centres and the home. The unlicensed centres are funded at a rate of only $1 per hour per child.

Recommendations

Much of the information gathered in the process of the consultations highlights the complexities associated with adjusting the total hours or the actual times the early childhood services are available, with parents' increasing hours of work, and with catering for shift work. Few specific recommendations were made, although the following were supplied by some groups.

Licensing of Pacific Island early childhood centres is a high priority for PIECCA, because women need to work "especially the need for the second income", many Pacific Island people "live under the poverty line", and their children need high-quality education "delivered in the mother tongue".

Limits should be maintained regarding the total number of hours per day a child participates in early childhood education and care. Representatives from Barnardo's New Zealand recommended that "There needs to be flexibility of care but thought given to the appropriateness of the total hours of care".

Multiple Use of the Early Childhood Education Services

Many informants from the early childhood sector described various difficulties and some specific benefits of children's concurrent or sequential participation in more than one early childhood education service.

Benefits

Choice and Diversity

The main benefit of both concurrent and sequential use of more than one service was described as "having a choice" or "diversity". Several groups said that this was a benefit, for example: "[The] Parents' Centre view would be again about choice, providing a choice for families to suit the needs of the children and the parents". Representatives of two groups said that flexibility of parent involvement was a related benefit. The representatives from Barnardo's New Zealand said there were more benefits than difficulties, because multiple use enables the family to experience a full range of services and experiences. They added that it is relatively easy to combine a family daycare arrangement with attending another service, in comparison with using two early childhood centres concurrently. A few participants suggested that the use of several services concurrently may be stimulating for 4-year-olds, depending on the child.

Age-appropriate Choices

Several participants raised the question as to why parents choose different services for different reasons, and for children of different ages. The focus here was on sequential changes, a child's movement from one type of service to another over time.

Representatives from Barnardo's New Zealand commented on younger infants and the use of family daycare:

> It's finding a balance. It's quite common perhaps for babies to start in family daycare and to move to centre-based care or kindergarten, for example, and that seems very appropriate. It's good to have that variety on offer, and it's good to let the parents decide which type of care is appropriate for their children.

A representative from the New Zealand Free Kindergarten Associations commented that some parents perceived that a benefit of changing services sequentially was having the choice to move into kindergarten, which parents sometimes see as "a sequential step in their child's development as it were before they progress on to school".

However, the position for playcentres appears rather different. A representative of New Zealand Playcentre Federation pointed out that playcentre is a "0 to 6 service". There was concern about playcentres losing their 4-year-olds: "If we lose our older children, which is another difficulty, then the role modelling is not as effective". These comments lead into the various difficulties which representatives from several groups described.

Difficulties

Stress on Family Members

One difficulty mentioned by most participating groups concerned the stress experienced by families when they concurrently use several early childhood education services. A representative from New Zealand Playcentre Federation said:

> It's confusing for children sometimes to be in a certain social group with trusted or known caregivers and then be swapped to another one on a daily basis. And also it's the parent's energy, I always think. . . . Because all early childhood has a fairly high voluntary component.

Instability for Children

Representatives of several groups expressed concern about the impact of multiple use on the stability of children's experiences. A few referred specifically to recent research findings, including those from the *Competent Children* study on helping children to develop their thinking (Meade & Cubey, 1995; Meade, Cubey, Hendricks, & Wylie, 1995). One informant questioned how, with widespread multiple use of services, "could you possibly spend enough time with the child to know what schema they're involved in, or what their interests are, or what's going on at home, or anything about that?" A few informants also referred to stability as a component of quality early childhood experience. This information was likely to be derived from Howes's (1986, 1988, 1990, 1991) research, which was discussed in *Striking a balance* (*see* Podmore, 1995).

Infants' and young children's multiple use of early childhood services remains a complex research area. The *Competent Children* longitudinal study is providing some ongoing information. For example, preliminary multiple regression analyses indicate that variables other than multiple use are the most important predictors of children's developmental outcomes by the age of 5 years (Wylie, 1996).

Funding Arrangements

Funding complexities were sometimes linked to a child's concurrent use of more than one service. For example, the representatives from Barnardo's New Zealand, although generally positive about multiple use, said that there are some difficulties:

> Mostly related to funding. There can be an issue as to which service accesses the funding. If the child is in care for 8 or 9 hours which is a very common length of care for children whose parents are working full time, and 2 services are used, as a maximum of 6 hours can be claimed from the Ministry [of Education] which service accesses the funding?

Collection of Accurate Statistical Data

Difficulties for researchers, planners, and policy makers were also specified. These concerned children's concurrent participation at more than one early childhood service. For example, representatives from the Ministry of Education commented on the difficulty of obtaining accurate statistics on children's actual participation rates in the early childhood services when children are concurrently enrolled with more than one service.

More information about the reasons for multiple use was also sought. The Employers' Federation wrote:

> Though it is known that multiple use is made of early childhood education services, the reasons why this should be so are not properly known. . . . To what extent is multiple use a question of choice, and to what extent is it a question of necessity?

Recommendations

Several groups recommended that parents need more information about the services available, before they make choices and changes. A representative of the Pacific Islands Early Childhood Council of Aotearoa recommended that more information needs to be available for parents. The barriers to using the Pacific Island early childhood centres include lack of information for parents about the value of bilingualism:

> Our parents need to be given the information that children can be better off with immersion and they can quickly catch up in English when they start school. Parents need to be informed and empowered to use Pacific Island early childhood centres.

Representatives from Te Tari Puna Ora O Aotearoa/New Zealand Childcare Association, who recommended that there is a need for more education of parents about choices, also suggested that:

> Where there are financial incentives to make multiple use financially cheaper, then that could be addressed. Because people will do what's cheaper if they have to, if they're really pushed.

Range of Early Childhood Education Services

There was widespread support for the benefits of having a range of early childhood services available.

Benefits

The majority of our informants said that parental choice is a benefit. A representative from Plunket commented that "One of the strengths of the early childhood sector in New Zealand is that each service has its own philosophy, traditions, management structures, and staffing structure".

Representatives from the NZEI Te Riu Roa explained that choice and quality are important:

> Having a choice of services is a benefit . . . the programme, the location., the hours, the nature of the arrangements of the services, this does provide parents with a range of services to choose from which is effective. There is the match of what is available with parents' employment needs, and people do that; the choice is a real benefit if they want to do something different or if they want their childcare to meet their employment needs. There is the importance too of meeting the needs of children, and having the range means that as families' needs change, they have that choice of changing their early childhood arrangements to one that is more likely to be able be tailored to meet those changes. . . . Whatever the choice of arrangements, there needs to be high, top-notch quality.

A representative from the New Zealand Employers Federation wrote:

> Since individuals make decisions of the basis of their particular circumstances and attitudes (one size does not fit all), it makes sense to have available a range of early childhood services. Even then, it is likely that many parents who are in a position to do so will make care arrangements to suit their specific situation.

Informants also described how voluntary involvement of family members has always been a feature of many of the early childhood education services, and that this has had spin-offs in terms of the upskilling of women, through movements like the kohanga reo and playcentre.

A representative from Parents' Centre commented: "the main thing is providing a choice for parents . . . it's the choice of the parents to suit themselves and their children and their work". This informant explained further that Parents' Centre has a role in providing information: "parenting information, courses, a lot of Parents' Centres run evenings, and seminars on choices in early childhood options".

Difficulties

The main difficulty described was how to communicate appropriate information to parents about the choices. Representatives from a range of groups said that parents had difficulties understanding the differences between services. A representative from the New Zealand Free Kindergarten Associations supported having the range of services available, but also commented that: "The major difficulty about it is that parents are unaware of the educational value of the different early childhood services offered".

A representative from the Pacific Islands Early Childhood Council of Aotearoa commented that sometimes the range is confusing for parents.

Other groups raised questions about whether there is in fact an immersion versus mainstream choice for Maori parents in rural areas, where they have limited choices and fewer employment opportunities. It was also pointed out that some parents do not have the confidence to involve their children in early childhood education.

Recommendations

Representatives of several groups recommended that parents need more readily accessible information, but not necessarily written information, about the different services. Parents need to know about immersion education, to understand the differences between services, and to know what is expected of them by each service in terms of parent involvement.

Language Maintenance, Parents in Paid Work, and Early Childhood Education

Representatives of almost all of the groups we consulted strongly affirmed in principle the importance of maintaining te reo Maori, and/or the Pacific Island languages. This report includes approved comments from the Pacific Islands Early Childhood Council of Aotearoa and Te Puni Kōkiri. Representatives of other groups responded to this question as early childhood educators, as parents and users, or as employers.

Support for Language Maintenance

All of our informants representing the early childhood organisations expressed their support for Maori and the Pacific Island language immersion through the kohanga reo and the Pacific Island early childhood centres.

Language Maintenance as an Additional Service

Several groups advocated that language immersion centres are offering a service which is additional to early childhood education. Representatives from Te Puni Kōkiri suggested that:

> The role of the kohanga reo (and other newly developing Māori immersion early childhood services) in transmitting te reo Māori could be considered as an additional service, or 'output'. Such services are actively promoting and maintaining te reo Māori as a taonga (treasure) and as the official language of New Zealand.

Maori Parents and Choice

Some of the representatives who participated in interviews were women who had themselves used a kohanga reo while in paid work. They recalled, in much the same way as families in the case studies reported in *Striking a balance*, that the use of Maori language was a positive experience for parents as well as children.

Funding and Licensing of Pacific Island Early Childhood Centres

Other issues raised by several groups included the level of support offered to the Pacific Island early childhood centres, and funding and licensing matters.

A representative from PIECCA commented that quality issues are important, and the Pacific Islands Early Childhood Council of Aotearoa "has a lawyer looking at quality and issues for the centres". Other recommendations about language maintenance were that:

> Pacific Island early childhood centres must be visible in the statistics published by the Ministry of Education and government. Otherwise they are hidden and buried underneath the childcare centres. Resources are needed, and translation of materials. . . . There must be some consideration of people with English as a second language. Non compliance is often a result of people not understanding documents. Maintenance of the language is important for young children. We really need to connect with parents and schools. New Zealand born parents do not always see the value of maintaining language and culture.

Employment Prospects

Only one group referred to a "dominant" language. The New Zealand Employers Federation concluded their response in this way:

> While acquiring knowledge of a particular language and culture is likely to be important, it should be remembered that some familiarity with the dominant language and culture is also essential if prospects of ultimate employment are not to be severely limited.

Access to the Early Childhood Education Services

Funding and Fees

Funding and Universal Provision

Representatives of several groups from the early childhood education sector and from community groups commented that early childhood education and care is not resourced adequately, which restricts choice.

Representatives of the NZEI Te Riu Roa recommended that funding should be "universal", "as in the school sector". They also commented:

> What we want to see is funding that is linked to quality of centres, with tagging of how it is to be spent. The other thing is that centres get it retrospectively so it's an absolute nightmare, and what we would like to see is the level of early childhood funding for the services raised.

They explained that members of the Early Childhood Education Project, representing family daycare, kindergarten, the kohanga reo, non-profit childcare, Pacific Island early childhood centres, playcentre, and NZEI Te Riu Roa, are developing "a whole funding proposal" addressing these funding and access issues. The Early Childhood Education Project is concerned with future directions in early childhood education. Their interim report, which has now been released, includes a set of funding recommendations developed with the goal of securing universal funding for the early childhood education services by the year 2000 (Early Childhood Education Project, 1996).

Targeting and Childcare Subsidies

Two groups we consulted expressed alternative views. They were against universal provision, and they favoured targeted funding to support low-income families.

However, several other informants pointed to current problems with such policies. There was concern that some specific groups of parents and their children are missing out on access because they are not eligible for the childcare subsidy:

> Some of the special circumstances don't seem to be covered by any sort of funding such as . . . a mother with psychiatric problems—we had a lot of difficulty getting any funding for her—, families who were just over the income level for the childcare subsidy, and families where there is a child with special needs. I've noticed they don't fit where the funding is at the moment.

Funding Levels

Representatives from several early childhood organisations contended that "funding levels are too low". A representative from Barnardo's New Zealand, for example, expressed this view and also pointed out some problems related to "inflexibilities":

> The funding is too low and too inflexible. There is going to be more flexibility from the 1st of July with the Ministry funding, which we support, but it's still going to be a limit of 6 hours a day, and 30 hours a week, and it's not available at weekends. This doesn't match current work patterns.

A representative from the New Zealand Playcentre Federation commented that equal funding levels are needed for all early childhood education services:

> We're a training provider as well as a sessional funder. We have to fund most of our training out of our sessional fund and that is a continual problem for playcentre. So funding for parent education is a difficulty, and it's a difficulty with access.

Fees

There was some concern that fees are a barrier to access to early childhood education. Representatives of the NZEI Te Riu Roa made these comments:

> The services should be high quality, they should be free, and children should be encouraged to use them. In terms of fees, fees are a barrier. Where there is targeting there are people who miss out on eligibility, there's also the stigma of applying, there are huge administrative problems so the cost of it escalates, and the ground rules keep changing. Then there's the poverty trap where people are eligible for a subsidy but when they raise their level of income they are no longer eligible for a subsidy.

The representative from the La Leche League wanted "publicly funded on-site" early childhood facilities.

Our informants from kindergarten and playcentre advocated "free" services. A representative from the New Zealand Free Kindergarten Associations explained further:

> The philosophy of the NZFKA is that there should be free access for children to kindergarten. That it's absolutely essential that there is a service that people can go to regardless of their ability to pay. We also believe that they should have access regardless of culture, religion, race, or gender. The word free in our title stands for that whole package and funding is just one strand of that package.

However, a representative from the Ministry of Education pointed out that in New Zealand: "funding and support for early childhood services has never been total, it's always been essentially a subsidy or support".

Representatives from Te Tari Puna Ora O Aotearoa/New Zealand Childcare Association recommended improving funding and reducing childcare fees. A representative from Barnardo's New Zealand said:

> Fees in the early childhood service are unaffordable for a lot of low-income families, and unless the funding is increased, I see no way around that because the services are charging what they need to charge, in order to be viable.

Similar views are also evident in research with parents, for example, in the study of 60 families in the lower North Island which preceded the *Striking a balance* report. Among the 60 families there were a few who found their access to early childhood education was limited by financial constraints (Podmore, 1994). Several families in the case studies in *Striking a balance* regarded childcare centre fees as unaffordable (Podmore & Sawicka, 1995).

The National Council of Women of New Zealand replied that their members "have continued to lobby the Government for child care to receive tax deductibility status". They believe that tax deductibility would "assist parents to return to the work force, help parents on benefits, and improve the performance of working parents as they would be able to afford higher quality child care".

Access Issues for Maori Families

Representatives from Te Puni Kōkiri pointed out that cost, transport, and lack of information are problems for Maori families. Their information was based, in part, on a recently commissioned report on barriers to Maori participation in early childhood education (Clark & Garden, 1995).

Access Issues for Pacific Island Families

A representative from PIECCA raised this question: "If 45 percent of our children aged 0 to 5 are in kindergarten, and 13 percent in Pacific Island early childhood centres, where are the others?" Access problems for Pacific Island families include poverty, fees and funding, lack of information, and distance. The representative explained that, with regard to information:

> There is a lack of information about the value of early childhood education. Parents think that the time to be educated is at school. Parents need to understand the value of early childhood education.

Distance, travel, and transport are problems, because:

> People do not have cars. They catch the bus to centres but in winter this is not appropriate. Some of the churches have managed to buy vans to take the children to the Pacific Island early childhood centre. For parents with 4 or 5 or 6 or 8 children, transport to early childhood centres is a major problem.

Funding is a problem, and licensing of the Pacific Island early childhood centres. This in turn affects employment of Pacific Island graduates in early childhood education from the colleges of education:

> There is a time for voluntary work, but the Pacific Island early childhood teachers and parents cannot be volunteers forever. They [the Pacific Island early childhood education graduates] need to be paid for the hours they spend at the centres.

Transport, Travel, and Siting of Centres

Transport to Early Childhood Centres

Several groups discussed the possibility of government-provided transport to early childhood centres. Representatives from Te Tari Puna Ora O Aotearoa/New Zealand Childcare Association commented on the difficulties experienced by low-income families on wet days: "the assumption that mothers with very small children can actually get themselves on foot to the nearest (centre) . . . is actually not often a valid assumption". They also pointed out the importance of maintaining adequate staff numbers and supervision.

Representatives from the Ministry of Education discussed the issue of providing transport, which had "come up in the context of some rural work". One representative mentioned that children aged

under 5 years do use school bus facilities in some areas "if there are sufficient adults there to supervise". They concluded that:

> The issue of centrally providing transport for young children to early childhood centres is too complex, but use of capital grants for vehicles to transport children could be considered (in line with the availability of these grants for mobile kindergarten vehicles).

Siting of Early Childhood Centres

Other informants made a range of comments about siting of centres. A representative from the New Zealand Free Kindergarten Associations wanted more cohesive planning for siting early childhood centres. Representatives from Barnardo's New Zealand commented that their early childhood centres are often sited in low-income areas to improve access for families.

The National Council of Women of New Zealand recommended siting a range of early childhood centres near schools. They wrote: "NCWNZ recommends that, as children all go to school at five years, various early childhood education services be instituted close to schools".

A representative from the New Zealand Playcentre Federation explained that in rural areas, funding policies limit access because it is difficult to maintain rural playcentres with small roll numbers. This informant recommended that, in addition to the sessional grant, a base level of funding is needed to maintain the service.

Changing Patterns of Parents' Paid Work and the Early Childhood Education Services

Changes within the Early Childhood Education Services

Representatives of many of the early childhood organisations discussed how their own organisations had responded to the changing patterns of parents' paid work. They all commented that they had made some changes, and that they were meeting the overall needs of the communities they served. These views were fairly consistent across many of the groups consulted. A few other informants expressed the view that there is a need for greater flexibility of services. However, flexibility appeared to have different meanings for different groups. These ranged from the early childhood organisations' attempts to meet the greatest possible range of their clients' (both children's and parents') needs, to those who were committed to flexibility as a necessity for an efficient economy.

The representatives of Te Tari Puna Ora O Aotearoa/New Zealand Childcare Association explained that the numbers of children attending childcare has grown because childcare centres are meeting the needs of parents in paid work. They said that another related issue concerns quality—childcare centres can "just spring up" and the quality of care and education provided by the centres is an important consideration.

Representatives from Barnardo's New Zealand commented that family daycare has more flexibility than many other early childhood services to cater for changing needs.

A representative from the New Zealand Free Kindergarten Associations responded that kindergartens are making changes to meet the needs of specific communities especially where there are no childcare centres available. This includes communities where parents are in seasonal work and part-time work. A representative commented, "While mindful of the need to change, we need to

acknowledge that there are 47,000 children's families who choose to use kindergarten to meet their early childhood educational needs".

A representative from the New Zealand Playcentre Federation also said that playcentres cater more for local communities. The issue of parents in paid work is not a major one for playcentre at the national level, but there have been some changes at the local level. For example, increasing numbers of nannies, grannies, other parents, and caregivers from Barnardo's New Zealand bring children to playcentre: "It's up to the individual centres and the circumstances. We try as much as possible to accommodate paid work . . . but generally parents in full-time paid work don't go to playcentre".

Several other informants also commented that kindergartens and/or playcentres cater for rural and local communities, and for families where parents are in part-time rather than full-time paid work.

Values and Assumptions

A representative from the Pacific Islands Early Childhood Council of Aotearoa said that it is working on the issues, the needs and aspirations of the people, and the "empowerment of people to become upskilled and agents of change". She commented further on cultural values: "all of the cultures of the Pacific are looking at what cultural needs must be maintained in Aotearoa, and what to modify here".

Several community groups, and the early childhood groups, questioned the assumptions and values underlying propositions that the early childhood services should accommodate parents' changing patterns of paid work. These groups advocated a greater focus on children and education.

Recommendations

Different groups made different recommendations, reflecting a range of concerns. The recommendations mainly concerned the practices of workplaces and the early childhood services, and the values of policy makers and society.

A representative from Te Tari Puna Ora O Aotearoa/New Zealand Childcare Association recommended that parents in the paid work force have time allocated to them to allow them to have contact time with early childhood centres:

> If parents are going to work all day then the only time [the staff] can meet with them is at night or at the weekend, so that's one possibility [if the staff are paid], and the other is that there should be more family friendly workplaces where parents could have . . . 3 days a year that they could actually spend either with their child or be available to talk to staff.

The representative from the La Leche League recommended having "flexibility" within workplaces and childcare centres, and "ease of access", to enable mothers in paid work to breastfeed.

Several community groups made recommendations about the impact of the economic system on parents' participation in paid work, and on the early childhood services. For example, a representative from one group recommended:

> Develop an economic system that guarantees families with young children an income that enables them to access ECE services that meet their needs. Develop an economic system that allows families to have young children to spend time with each other and be able to "make ends" meet.

Links Between Early Childhood Education, Parental Leave, the Labour Market, and Health Policies

Representatives from a range of groups commented on the importance of the impact of interconnected policies on children. A representative from one group suggested that "There should be overall guidelines developed by government that protect children's and families' rights".

There were also comments about the outcomes of the co-ordination of education and health policies for some parents. A couple of informants suggested that some single parents lack access to services. Their view was that funding is needed to enable mobile, sensitive professionals from both education and health to visit homes where depressed single parents, or non-English-speaking grandparents, care for children at home. Some said that there is scope for a visiting teacher system or for schemes to fill the gaps previously covered by public health nurses.

Several early childhood education groups referred to immunisation policy as one area where they thought there may be scope for a more meshed and integrated approach. Their representatives advocated more consultation and communication between policy makers and professionals from education and health.

One organisation replied that the "obvious answer is through legislation". Their written submission also stated that: "The difficulty with legislation is, however, that it inevitably reduces flexibilities and removes the right of choice".

Representatives from a range of groups provided some examples of links across policy areas. Most informants stressed the importance of planning and wide consultation, and commented that there is a communication issue. Some of the groups supplied examples of ways in which communication is potentially encouraged at the policy level. Examples included through intergovernmental committees and meetings of chief executive officers. Our informants also commented on how some government ministries and departments do work across policy areas within specific population groups. They mentioned these examples: Te Puni Kōkiri, the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, and the Ministry of Women's Affairs.

Several groups provided examples of "grass-roots" initiatives based in the community or on the marae, which link the provision of early childhood education and/or language immersion provision with health promotion and labour market information.

Finally, several informants also suggested that research studies may foster the interlinkages between early childhood education, health, and employment. *Striking a balance* was cited as an example.

Themes and Issues

Valuing Children

Several groups recommended placing children or early childhood education at the centre of policy decisions on parents' labour market participation. Their position on valuing children's needs above labour market needs was prominent in their discussion of most of the interview questions. A few informants referred to the emphasis placed by several Danish researchers and writers on affording priority to children. These Nordic and Danish perspectives were outlined in the literature reviewed in *Striking a balance (see* Podmore, 1995).

Child, family, early childhood education, and labour market factors all impinge on getting parents into paid work. One fundamental conflict uncovered was whether parents and families serve the

economy, or whether the economy serves families. This in turn impinges on parents' agendas during the first 5 years of children's lives. Information from several groups of informants suggests that the push to move parents into paid work may influence parents' agendas, so that they search for care to fit in with their hours of work first, and quality early childhood education is relegated to second priority. Mothers in paid work are balancing multiple needs, and several groups pointed out that children are the ones who may miss out. There appears to be a trend towards early childhood education groups and community groups advocating for the children.

If policies were to cater predominantly for parents in the labour market who are earning, there would be a potential risk that increasing demands for payment of fees would exclude the poor at home from having access to early childhood centres. This also raises a gender issue, if those remaining at home are mainly women and children. However, almost all groups we consulted said that diversity is a strength in the early childhood sector. This supports the importance of resourcing a wide range of early childhood education services to meet the needs of children and their families.

Parental Choice

Parental choice was another theme. It became evident that choice was associated with a range of different meanings, and the meanings of choice also varied across some groups. For this reason, we carried out further analyses of the 13 transcripts and 3 sets of written comments, by searching them all for each use of "choice" or "choose" as applied to parent choice, and then examining each of these excerpts on choice for meaning and context. After scrutinising a total of 69 excerpts concerned with choice, several main meanings of choice emerged.

Some meanings focused on choices for individuals, some on choices for family groups, and others on choices for groups of people in society. Choices were perceived as either individual and personal, or collective and related to the needs of a group or the family members' position in one or more larger socio-economic or cultural groups. In *Striking a balance*, an analysis of the theoretical models from the United States which link work and family life showed that focusing entirely on the individual excludes the wider family/whanau context.

Among the early childhood groups the most prevalent issues were:

- choice and quality;
- cost, affordability and choice;
- choice and the need for parent information;
- language maintenance and choice; and
- choice and meeting children's developmental needs.

Representatives from several early childhood groups also discussed their own organisation's policies regarding choice of specific early childhood services. Several policy and community groups talked about choice and diversity meeting different needs of different groups in society. Language maintenance and choice was the prominent concern of some community groups and groups representing Maori, and affordability and meeting the needs of groups of children were also concerns. For the Pacific Island groups, choosing was associated with affordability and financial constraints.

From an employers' perspective, there was a need for more information about parents' preferred options, for example about whether parents would prefer to use private and informal arrangements or the early childhood education services, and whether single parents would choose to use formal services

if they were available for longer hours. Choice also meant avoiding legislation which "restricts choice".

Quality of Services

Both parental choice, and ensuring high-quality early childhood education services, were of concern to most of the groups we consulted. National seminars held during the 1990s have focused on each of these issues. A national seminar on assessing and improving quality in early childhood centres, organised by the Children's Issues Centre in Dunedin, took place in Wellington in May 1996 when our consultations were nearing completion. Clearly then, these two issues were topical and current within the early childhood and policy circles.

Among our informants, the most prevalent concept associated with choice was "quality". The importance of high-quality early childhood education for young children's development is documented in *Striking a balance: Families, work, and education*. Reference is also made in that publication to Langsted's (1994) argument for policies and structures which recognise young children themselves as stakeholders in the quality debate. Recent research and writing summarised from the Nordic countries shows an inclusive approach to defining quality childcare, with an emphasis on children's perspectives and experiences.

Representatives from a range of policy and early childhood groups supported the linking of funding and quality. There appeared to be some diversity in the rationale for this. The underlying concerns ranged from children's rights, at one end of the spectrum, to economic return. Some informants perceived the early childhood services as businesses. However, representatives of early childhood organisations saw early childhood education as a service. These very different conceptualisations of the reason for the existence of the early childhood services may have different outcomes for the kind of early childhood education and care provided. Whatever the different conceptualisations were, the need for high-quality early childhood education services received strong support from most of our informants.

Representatives from childcare groups expressed concern about parents' lack of information about the importance and dimensions of quality. This appears to be an area where there is scope for more co-ordinated work to be continued for the benefit of children and their families.

Pacific Island Early Childhood Education

Problems of poverty and inequality were brought to our attention, for example among the Pacific Island communities. The need for resources for language maintenance and cultural continuity was a major issue. A representative of the Pacific Islands Early Childhood Council of Aotearoa explained that:

> More resources are needed; licensing and information are also needed. Resources are needed in centres so that education can go side-by-side with the language learning. The centres have all *palagi* equipment and resources.

For the Pacific Island communities, language maintenance is an important issue which appears to be related closely to migration. The time of migration may influence the importance placed on language maintenance, and our informants referred to how they "feel for the one or two Pacific Island groups in New Zealand whose languages are in danger of being lost if they do not work hard to maintain them".

There is also concern about the about concept of the playgroup:

> Playgroup is a *palagi* concept, from a Pacific Islands perspective, where mothers are gathered with their children to be socialised and learn from few resources provided through small grants from the Ministry through the Early Childhood Development Unit. This is considered an easy and less costly way of getting a high number of these kinds of playgroup, with some increase in funding to the agency, while the quality of education being delivered is questionable. This situation contributed to a rapid mushrooming of playgroups in different parts of New Zealand, which has now become the issue of unlicensed centres—over 200.
>
> From 3 to 5 years, these playgroups have been operating in sub-standard facilities with unqualified people, having shorter and inappropriate hours for the working parents, and receiving no bulk grants like the licensed and chartered centres. This situation was never an issue for a number of years for it was considered normal for these centres to continue in this playgroup situation, until parents, Pacific Island communities, and PIECCA started to bring it to the surface where it was picked up by politicians, and therefore the present move came to license these playgroups.
>
> When the Pacific Island community finally caught up and realised the consequences of this kind of situation, Pacific Island people want education for their children, they want the best like any other New Zealand parents; not just having their children socialised in second-best settings such as playgroups forever.

Children's transition to school from the playgroups, and their subsequent learning and achievement in the school system, were a major concern.

Recently, the Ministry of Education pointed out that the Pacific Island population in New Zealand "is very young" with "just under 50% of the population under 20 years", and "this results in a high proportion of Pacific Island people in compulsory education" (1996, April, p. 1). In addition, a high proportion of the Pacific Island population in New Zealand is aged under 5 years. Among the Pacific Island population nearly 16 percent are children aged under 5 years, whereas among the non-Pacific Island ("other") population almost 8 percent are children aged under 5 years. These percentages highlight the importance of the provision of quality early childhood education services to meet the needs of Pacific Island children in New Zealand, the majority of whom are described as "of Samoan, Cook Islands Maori, Tongan, Niuean, Fijian, and Tokelau origin" (Ministry of Education, 1996, April, p. 1).

Other representatives also noted that the Employment Task Force had placed some emphasis on the Pacific Island early childhood centres' need for financial assistance.

SUMMARY

In summary, this brief report presents the information provided by 16 key early childhood, community, and policy groups. In addition to the main topics covered in the consultations, some further themes and issues are identified.

- Representatives of many of the key groups described both difficulties and benefits of *work-based early childhood education*. Comments were also made on the relative importance of this topic in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The main *difficulties* are:
  - the adequacy of outdoor space;
  - health and safety concerns;
  - workplace restructuring and stability for children;
  - high fees and related access difficulties;
  - problems for small-scale workplaces;
  - restricted choice regarding language;
  - separation of children from their home communities; and
  - reduced opportunities for active involvement of parents and volunteers.

  Representatives also described *benefits* of work-based early childhood education, such as:
  - convenience for breastfeeding mothers and parent-child contact;
  - a greater gender balance in workplaces which provide early childhood education facilities;
  - provision of capital costs;
  - potentially enhanced loyalty and productivity among staff with childcare requirements; and
  - convenience for parents in terms of transport or parking.
- The *operating hours* of the early childhood services were discussed, with a focus on parents in shift work, and on parents' total hours of paid work. Representatives of many groups commented on the importance of catering for parents in shift work. Some expressed concern about the impact of long hours of work on children and families. Related funding policies and affordability problems were also discussed, with a focus on low-income parents seeking childcare to cover their hours of paid work. Specific problems for Pacific Island communities concerned the need to upgrade and license centres. The large number of unlicensed Pacific Island early childhood centres are permitted to operate for only very limited hours and therefore do not cater for most working parents.
- Informants from the early childhood sector described various difficulties and some specific benefits of children's concurrent or sequential *participation in more than one early childhood education service*. *Benefits* of multiple use were described as:
  - choice and diversity for parents, and
  - having age-appropriate choices available for children.

  Difficulties were:
  - stress on family members using more than one service concurrently;
  - potential instability for children; and
  - problems with planning services and collecting statistics on attendance rates.
- There was widespread support for the benefits of having *a range of services* available. Diversity was supported as a strength, and diverse services support an existing range of needs among families in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The majority of groups believed that choice is a benefit. The main

drawback was a lack of accessible information for parents about the choices. Several ways of addressing this problem were suggested.

- Representatives of most groups strongly affirmed in principle the importance of *maintaining te reo Maori and/or the languages from the Pacific Islands*. It was proposed that language maintenance should be valued as an additional service. The importance of Maori language maintenance was evident in terms of Treaty obligations. For children in migrant families, maintaining their parents' language and knowledge of their parents' culture may have positive outcomes for their self-esteem and implications for how they contribute to the society their parents have chosen for them.
- *Access* to the early childhood education services was discussed in terms of fees and funding, and transport, travel, and siting of centres. Comments were recorded about universal versus targeted funding, and insufficient funding and resourcing were clearly concerns of informants from the early childhood sector. There were several specific access issues for Maori families and for Pacific Island families. There were several suggestions about transport and siting of centres, but few clear recommendations.
- Representatives of many of the early childhood organisations discussed how their own organisations had responded to the *changing patterns of parents' paid work*. They all commented that they had made some changes, and that they were meeting the overall needs of the communities they served. These views were fairly consistent across many of the groups consulted. However, a few other informants expressed the view that there is a need for greater flexibility of services. Several community groups made recommendations about the impact of the economic system on parents in paid work, families, and the early childhood services.
- Representatives from a range of groups commented on the importance of the *impact of interconnected policies* on children. There were comments about the outcomes of the co-ordination of education and health policies for some groups of parents. One organisation raised the question of legislation, but warned that this would restrict choice. Representatives from a range of groups provided some examples of links across policy areas. Most informants stressed the importance of planning and wide consultation, and commented that there is a communication issue. Some supplied examples of ways in which communication is potentially encouraged at the policy level. Several groups provided examples of "grass-roots" initiatives based in the community or on the marae, and some suggested that research studies may foster the interlinkages between early childhood education, health, and employment.
- *Other main themes* evident in the interview transcripts and written submissions from the key groups are:
  - children's needs and valuing children,
  - parental choice,
  - quality early childhood education services, and
  - inequality, resourcing, and the specific needs of the Pacific Island early childhood centres.

  The most prevalent concept associated with families' choices was "quality" of the early childhood education services.

This short report documents a range of diverse views and experiences from some key interest groups in the community. The report does not provide a set of recommendations, but it does point to complexities and raise some issues relevant to policy makers, the early childhood services, children, and families.

REFERENCES

Callister, P., & Podmore, V.N., with Galtry, J., & Sawicka, T. (1995). *Striking a balance: Families, work, and early childhood education.* Wellington: NZCER.

Clark, E., & Garden, C. (1995). *Barriers to Māori participation in early childhood education and strategies to overcome them.* Wellington: Te Puni Kōkiri.

Early Childhood Education Project. (1996). *Future directions: Early childhood education in New Zealand Interim Report June 1996.* Wellington: Early Childhood Education Project, c/o NZEI Te Riu Roa.

Howes, C. (1986). *Quality indicators for infant-toddler childcare.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, C.A. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 273 385)

Howes, C. (1988). Relations between early child care and schooling. *Developmental Psychology, 24,* 53–57.

Howes, C. (1990). Can the age of entry into childcare and the quality of childcare predict adjustment in kindergarten? *Developmental Psychology, 26,* 292–303.

Howes, C. (1991). Children's experiences in child care: Does age of entry or quality of care matter? In M. Gold, L. Foote, & A. Smith (Eds.), *Proceedings of the Fifth Early Childhood Convention* (pp. 23–33). Dunedin, New Zealand.

Langsted, O. (1994). Looking at quality from the child's perspective. In P. Moss & A. Pence (Eds.), *Valuing quality in early childhood services: New approaches to defining quality* (pp. 28–42). London: Teachers College Press.

Meade, A., with Cubey, P. (1995). *Thinking children: Learning about schemas.* Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research and Institute for Early Childhood Studies, Wellington College of Education/Victoria University of Wellington.

Meade, A., & Cubey, P. with Hendricks, A., & Wylie, C. (1995). *Competent children and their teachers: Learning about trajectories and other schemas.* Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research and Faculty of Education, Victoria University of Wellington.

Ministry of Education. (1996, April). Pacific Islands people in New Zealand schools. *The New Zealand Education Gazette, 75,* (6), pp. 1–3.

Podmore, V.N. (1994). *Employment and childcare arrangements among families.* Wellington: NZCER.

Podmore, V.N. (1995). Early childhood education and care services and parents in paid work. In P. Callister & V.N. Podmore, with J. Galtry & T. Sawicka, *Striking a balance: Families, work, and early childhood education* (pp. 77–95). Wellington: NZCER.

Podmore, V.N., & Sawicka, T. (1995). Parents' voices: Case studies of families' employment and childcare arrangements. In P. Callister & V.N. Podmore, with J. Galtry & T. Sawicka, *Striking a balance: Families, work, and early childhood education* (pp. 119–167). Wellington: NZCER.

Wylie, C. (1996, May). *Early childhood services and children's competencies.* Paper presented at a research seminar organised at the Auckland College of Education with the early childhood research group from the New Zealand Council for Educational Research, Auckland.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ON EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND PARENTS IN PAID WORK

Striking a Balance:
Families, Work, and Early Childhood Education

Consultations with National-level Representatives
of Key Influential Groups

Recommendations about early childhood education and parents in paid work, and about parental leave, are sought from key groups. This consultation process is the final stage of a research programme on Families, Work, and Education, funded by Foundation for Research, Science and Technology and carried out jointly by NZCER and Paul Callister and Associates.

The information will be stored in the offices of the New Zealand Council for Educational Research and of Paul Callister & Associates. In any reports on this consultation, individuals will not be identified, only the organisations they represent. Paul Callister will have the primary responsibility for writing up and reporting the questions about parental leave; Val Podmore from NZCER will have the primary responsibility for writing up and reporting on the questions about early childhood education and parents in paid work. The information will be collated, published, and also disseminated as part of a national seminar on "Striking a Balance: Families, Work, and Early Childhood Education" at NZCER, planned for June 1996. Thank you for considering our questions.

***(For interviews)**: We would like to tape this interview, if you are happy about this. The tapes are confidential to the research team, and the tapes will be wiped after what you say has been written down/transcribed. If at any point during the interview you would like the tape recorder turned off, please ask.*

Your organisation's views are important to the study. But if there are any questions you would rather not answer, or you feel are outside your organisation's area, that's quite all right, we'll leave them out. The main purpose of the interview is to collect information, views, and recommendations from your organisation.

Early Childhood Education and Parents in Paid Work

On the basis of *Striking a Balance: Families, Work, and Early Childhood Education,* and of your experience in the field:

1. What are the benefits and problems associated with work-based (industry-based) early childhood education/care?

   - What are your recommendations about work-based early childhood services?

2. What are the benefits and difficulties of maximising parents' work time by increasing the hours that early childhood education services are available?

   - What are your recommendations about early childhood centres' hours of opening on weekdays, and during weekends and public holidays?

3. What are the benefits and difficulties of multiple use of the early childhood education services for young children?

   What are the benefits and difficulties of multiple use of the early childhood education services for parents?

   -What are your recommendations about concurrent or sequential use of more than one early childhood service?

4. How does having a range of different early childhood services benefit, or cause difficulties for, parents and young children?

5. What are your recommendations about language maintenance, parents in paid work, and early childhood education? (For example, at the kohanga reo and/or the Pacific Island early childhood centres?).

6. What are your recommendations regarding access to the early childhood education services?

   - access in terms of fees and funding?

   - access in terms of transport, travel, and siting of centres?

7. To what extent do the early childhood services accommodate New Zealand families' changing patterns of paid work?

   -Are there any changes you would recommend to help meet the needs of young children with parents in paid work?

8. How could the links be strengthened between early childhood education policies, parental leave and other labour market policies, and health policies?

9. Have you any other recommendations about early childhood education and parents in paid work?